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## **Towards making 2013 a "Year of Air"**

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EP evening event "Air quality in European Cities" (organised by EEB and German member BUND)

**Brussels, 22 March 2011**

First I would like to thank the EEB and BUND for organising this event.

This is of course an important subject for me and, I am convinced, also for all the citizens. And this is truly a timely opportunity to share and discuss with you the work we have planned to improve air quality in Europe.

Today I want to talk to you about the successes and challenges for EU air policy, the reasons behind poor quality particularly in urban areas and my programme for a comprehensive review of air policy by 2013.

Let me start with some good news:

Air quality policy in the EU has been overall a success story. Since the Nineties, we have managed to reduce air pollution by almost all relevant identified pollutants. Nitrous oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) are down by 39%, sulphur dioxide by 78%, heavy metals between 60-90%.

These reductions – and the improvements in air quality they bring – have been achieved through continuous legislative action for land-based or moving sources, like vehicles.

And even though it set only interim health and environmental targets to be reached by 2020, the 2005 Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution was a real milestone.

So some real success. But we are still some way from reaching our 'holy grail' – set out in the 6<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme - to ensure that air pollution does not pose any significant risk to human health and the environment.

A moment ago, I gave you some figures concerning reductions in the level of some pollutants. Certainly for particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>) and nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) levels decreased in the late 90s and have been more or less stable in recent years. But this still means that between 1997 and 2008 as many as 62% of Europeans in cities could have been exposed to harmful PM.

Because of these facts and because any action would have to be 'phased in', changes to the air quality directive since 2008 allow Member States to extend the deadline for applying the PM<sub>10</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub> and benzene limit values.

Most Member States have done this for PM<sub>10</sub>. Roughly one third of the air quality zones were notified for an exemption. Out of those zones only about 20% of them fulfilled all the conditions set out in the Directive, to grant an exemption which in the case of PM<sub>10</sub> runs until 11 June 2011.

As regards NO<sub>2</sub> it is early days. The limit values have been applicable since 1 January last year and any request for a postponement of the deadline has to be sent to the Commission by the end of September this year. It is already clear however that most Member States will require an extension of the deadline until 2015.

For ozone, there is little to report. Over the past decade, ozone concentrations have frequently and widely exceeded health-related target values. Since ozone is formed in the atmosphere, the weather has an important impact on the amount of ozone in the air. Heat waves for example, can cause large variations in the amount of ozone.

I said I also wanted to talk about urban air quality. The reasons for poor air quality in our cities are well known. There are more of them, than I could cover in one speech. The short version is that the main culprits are industry, transport, energy production, agriculture and households. Particulate Matter, Nitrogen dioxide and ozone are the main causes of concern with regard to health.

And it's not just air pollution from within cities that's the problem. Air pollution from outside cities can be as high as 40% of the air quality levels, as is the case in London.

Weather and geography also have an influence. Some major cities (such as Milan) have a much harder task bringing down air pollution levels than others simply because of local weather conditions. Some think that this should be factored into our objective setting, which I think would be wrong. We cannot have different levels of health protection in different cities. It is important that we have the same level of ambitious protection for every European. Of course this doesn't mean we will ignore difficult local conditions when we're looking at how we can solve specific air quality problems.

One problem worth mentioning is certainly also the discrepancy between what we call "real world emissions" and the emissions under the standards. In recent years, there is increasing evidence that diesel cars, vans, buses and lorries have higher emissions under real driving conditions than those prescribed by legislation. This applies to newer EUROV/5 vehicles as well as to EURO III and IV. These differences can be enormous – in some cases up to 500% of the limit value in the type approval.

We anticipate that the same will be the case for EUROVI/6 should we not be able to resolve this gap between the objective in the legislation and the amount emitted in reality. The result would be that a big part of the predicted air quality improvements expected through its introduction would be simply wiped out.

What are the reasons for these differences? First, the test cycle required by the legislation does not reflect real driving conditions. Second, the emission abatement technology in the vehicles may deteriorate over time. Third, some cars may be 'tweaked' to fulfil the required test cycle in laboratory conditions but run outside the optimum when they are on the road.

The Commission has recognised these problems and has already taken some action. In the Communication on Clean and Energy Efficient Cars, from April 2010, my colleague Antonio Tajani proposed how we could rectify this situation. This included the development of a new, global, and more realistic test cycle, the introduction of additional off-cycle tests, so-called portable emission measurement systems, and the introduction of anti-tampering provisions. For heavy-duty vehicles, these are now part of the type-approval legislation for EUROVI. For cars, I am working closely with Vice-President Tajani to ensure that the necessary technical developments are completed by 2013.

But even this ambitious time-frame cannot help with today's and yesterday's cars. Moreover, new EURO VI/6 type approved cars and other vehicles will hit the road too late to have an impact on the ambient air quality legislation until the deadlines under the Air Quality Directive expire. Member States will have to take transitional measures to address this time gap.

The challenge for all of us is therefore to address these acknowledged shortcomings in a decisive and co-ordinated way. This will require the good will of policy-makers at all levels – European, national, regional and local – as well as of other stakeholders such as the car and oil industries.

This leads me directly to the actions to which I am committed during my mandate.

You will know that I am planning to make 2013 the "Year of Air". In January this year, we debated the issue with all the Commissioners, and President Barroso.

The results were encouraging. Everyone recognised that improving air quality is a pressing need and a shared responsibility requiring our joint efforts. Everyone accepted the need for a renewed and comprehensive air quality policy, to be launched in 2013 at the latest, and it was agreed that this wider review should also include a revision of the National Emission Ceilings Directive (NEC Directive).

We also agreed collectively that we will take action immediately in the short term such, including on the revision of the sulphur content in fuels directive in spring 2011.

I have also made a number of proposals on urban air quality to address the problem of "real world emissions" I spoke about earlier. I'm hoping that they will improve the situation and help Member States do what they need to do. These initiatives include the early introduction of clean vehicles in those urban areas with air quality problems as part of demonstration projects or the greater promotion of retrofitting old vehicles with new 'air-friendly' technology.

These will be discussed as part of the CARS21 debate and will form part of the interim report we will discuss in June.

Looking slight further ahead, we will launch our consultation process soon for the comprehensive review. This will focus, in particular, on the revision of the national emission ceilings directive, something that has been overdue for a while. There are a number of reasons for this, such as the links with the climate and energy package of 2008, which we wanted to decide first. However, I don't want to dwell on the past now. I would rather look forward and prepare and present a revision which sets out new targets for 2020 and possibly beyond.

On the NEC and also the ambient air quality directive, let me say clearly, that it is not my intention to tear down and re-build the principles and objectives of these cornerstones of EU air policy.

We want is rather to improve and further develop the legislation **beyond** what we have now based on the principles of smart legislation. But for me the limit values or timetables are not negotiable.

It is clear that we will need to continue identifying further emission reduction potentials to achieve our objectives in the area of air quality.

I am confident, that within the context of the EU 2020 Strategy, and through the various initiatives that will soon come out of the Climate, Transport and Energy Directorates of the European Commission, as well as and the revision of other policy areas such as agriculture, we will find ways to reduce emissions and improve our air quality.

I am also confident that we can make progress with our international partners, e.g. under the Convention on long-range transboundary air pollution.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I think all of us, at whatever level of governance, can be proud of what we have done to improve European air quality.

But the job is not done yet.

Now we must all take a deep breath of that precious air and get down to the business of reviewing air policy, so that we can make 2013 a successful "Year of Air".

Thank you for your attention and...of course, thank you also (in advance) for all your much appreciated help needed to make it happen.